

*The Objections, against the Eternity of Hell
Torments, Answer'd.*

I N A

SERMON

Preach'd before

KING WILLIAM,

A T

Kensington, January, 1701.

MATTH 25. 41.

*Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, depart
from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepar'd
for the Devil and his Angels*

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MATTHEW 25. 41.

Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels.

T Here remains yet one thing to be done, in relation to the subject, which I am now upon, *viz.* the *eternity of Hell-Torments*: and that is, to answer the most material objections against it. And they, I think, are these three.

First, That there are several Texts of Scripture, which prove that God will not lay everlasting punishments, or torments, upon Sinners.

Secondly, That it is cruel and unjust, to punish temporary sins with eternal torments, and therefore we may be sure that God will not do it.

Lastly, That, tho' it should be allow'd that God has plainly threatened eternal punishments, yet he is not oblig'd rigorously to make good his threatnings, but may mitigate, or recede from, them, as far as he pleaseth: and that, therefore, we cannot certainly infer from them, that sinners shall be eternally punish'd.

First, That there are several Texts of Scripture, which prove that God will not lay everlasting punishments, or torments, upon sinners. This was pretended as long ago, as before St. *Jerom's* time, who in his *Comments* upon the last Chapter of *Isaiab*, gives us an account of some of the Texts, that had been produc'd, for this purpose. And, that this should have been pretended, is no great wonder: especially in those early times of *Christianity*, when Men's respect for the Holy Scriptures was so great, that it was in vain to offer to set up any new Opinions, without, some appearance at least of, countenance from Scripture. But that there should really be any good ground from thence, to believe that the torments



ments of the damned shall not be eternal, notwithstanding those many plain Texts of Scripture, which so expressly assert that they shall, is utterly strange and inconceivable.

However, let us look a little upon these Texts of Scripture, which are pretended to prove this point, and then we shall soon be able to judge, whither they really do so or no. Now the Texts which are commonly urg'd for this end, are these which follow. *My spirit shall not always strive with man*, Gen. 6. 3. *Will the Lord cast off for ever, and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clear gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* Ps. 79. 7, 8, 9. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.* Ps. 103. 8, 9. *Hot coals shall fall upon them, thou shalt cast them into the fire: they shall not subsist in their miseries.* Ps. 140. 10. According to the Translation of the vulgar Latin. *O Lord I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turn'd away, and thou comfortest me.* Isai. 12. 1. *And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days they shall be visited.* Isai. 24. 22. *For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.* Isa. 57. 16. *I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinn'd against him, until he plead my cause and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity; and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.* Micah 7. 9, 18. *These shall receive a longer judgment, or damnation.* Mark 12. 40. According to the Translation of the vulgar Latin. *God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.* Rom. 11. 32. *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.* Rev. 20. 14.

Now, not to enter upon a particular discussion of every one of these Texts, which would run out into much too

great a length, for my present discourse: I shall content myself, with making a general observation or two upon them. As

First, That it cannot be prov'd that any one of the Texts, alledg'd out of the old Testament, has any manner of relation to the subject, which we are now upon, viz. *Hell-Torments*. One of them, that seems to bid fairest for this, Ps. 140. 10. *Hot coals shall fall upon them, thou shalt cast them into the fire: they shall not subsist in their miseries*, is plainly a mistranslation of the original words, which ought to have been translated thus, *Hot coals shall fall upon them, or let hot coals fall upon them, be shall, or let him, cast them into the fire: into deep pits, that they may not rise up again*. And thus restor'd to their true Translation, if they did at all relate to Hell-Torments, they would rather prove the eternity of them, than the contrary: for not to rise up again, out of the fire, out of the deep pits, must certainly signify everlastingly to continue in them. And accordingly some Expositors (*v. Pol. in loc.*) do make these words to be a prediction or imprecation of the fire of Hell, that everlasting fire, out of which none shall ever rise up, upon the Psalmist's Enemies. But this seems to be too harsh a sense; and besides is not generally approv'd of by Commentators, who take these words to be only a denuntiation or imprecation of some very severe temporal judgment in this Life (such as was that of raining fire and brimstone upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrhab*, to which many suppose the Psalmist here refers) but not to relate to the judgment of the other.

In like manner, all the rest of the Texts, when we come to compare them with their contexts, will be found to belong more naturally a great deal, to the judgments of God against Sinners in this Life, than to their Torments in the next: and are commonly adjudg'd to do so, by Expositors. As to instance in one for all; and that seemingly the likeliest of any to relate to the future punishments of the wicked. 'I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made, *Isai. 57. 16*. This consider'd, as it stands by it self, looks plausibly enough against the eternity of Hell-Torments; but

but then consider'd, as it stands in the middle of a Prophecy relating to the temporal restitution of the Jewish Church and Nation, as is plain from the 13th ver. just before, where mention is made of possessing the land, and inheriting God's holy mountain: it must, in all reason, be understood of God's removing his temporal Judgments from his People, that so they might not be quite weary'd out, and perish under them. And in this sense, much the greatest part of Commentators understand them.

But it will be said, (*v. Pol. in loc.*) if this be so, to what purpose did the opposers of the eternity of Hell-Torments produce these Texts? Could they hope to support their cause, by Texts so apparently nothing relating to it? I answer, that, in the primitive times of Christianity, they probably enough might have had some hope of this; because nothing was more common then, and that too amongst the Learnedest of the first Christians, than to apply, and admit of Texts of Scripture, in any sense that, upon a general view, they seem'd capable of; without nicely inquiring into the circumstances of the context, which were the most likely means to lead them, to a true understanding of those Texts. And accordingly we frequently find Texts apply'd to subjects, which they have no manner of relation to: and, which is the greatest unhappiness of all, very great stress sometimes laid upon these misapply'd Texts, and that too in relation to subjects of the highest importance. But,

Secondly, I observe that these Texts, out of the Old Testament, of which it is at least doubtful, very doubtful, whither they relate at all to Hell-Torments or no, are set in opposition to Texts of the other side, out of the New, which, beyond all doubt, do relate to them. Texts taken out of places, purposely treating of them, particularly describing them: Texts expressing our Saviour's own Words concerning them; and containing in them the very words of that sentence, by which the wicked shall be doom'd to everlasting fire, and the certain execution of that sentence.

Lastly, As to the Texts produc'd out of the New Testament against the eternity of Hell-Torments: I observe that

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the first of them, *These shall receive a longer damnation*, Mark 12. 40. is falsly rendred by the vulgar Latin: and should be translated, *these shall receive a greater, or more abundant damnation*, περισσώτερον κείναι, which are the Original words. And thus translated, they are evidently nothing to the purpose of the eternity of Hell-Torments. I having before shew'd you, that the difference, that shall be in these, shall be, not in their duration, but intenseness.

The next Text, Rom. 11. 32. *God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all*, plainly relates to the mercy of God, in bringing both *Jews and Gentiles* to the belief of the Gospel, as appears from the Context: and therefore signifieth nothing, as to the Torments of the Damn'd.

As little to the purpose is the last Text, Revel. 20. 14. *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death*. For by Hell there we are to understand the state of separate souls, as it is well known the original word *Αἴης* signifies; which separate state shall be no more (after the Day of Judgment, of which the Apostle was there speaking, when all Souls shall be reunited to their proper Bodies) but shall be swallow'd up, together with death, in the lake of fire and brimstone. And thus the best Commentators understand these words. But to suppose that by *Hades* here we are to understand Hell, as it signifieth the place and state of the damn'd, would be to make nonsense of the Apostle's Words. For, at this rate, they must mean that Hell should be cast into a part of it self, as the lake of fire is acknowledg'd to be. Besides that, by giving up Hell to this second death, (*App. ad Leviath. p. 335.*) Mr. Hobbs, who urgeth these words as an argument against the eternity of Hell-Torments, would not have his end: since, as I have prov'd, in my former discourse, this Phrase second death signifies a state of Torments, and that too as lasting as Immortality it self. So that he would only throw away one Hell, which he is so willing to have lost, into another Hell, which he would be just as unwilling to find: and what would he get by that? Tho' indeed, if he would throw away Hell,

Hell, immediately upon or after the Day of Judgment, as he must do, if he throws it away by vertue of this Text, he cannot do fairer, than to throw it away into another Hell, just as bad as it self, that so God's enemies may not escape his vengeance, just then, when one would expect it should begin to take everlasting hold of them.

Upon the whole : We have not so much as one Text, out of the New Testament, where one might most reasonably hope to find evidence, as to any thing belonging to our future State, which doth in the least tend to invalidate our belief of the eternity of Hell-Torments. And those which are brought, out of the Old Testament, for this purpose, are either mistranslated, or misapply'd, or even contrary to the very purpose, which they are brought for. Whereas, on the other side, the Texts, which are alledg'd in proof of the eternity of Hell-Torments, are, almost all, taken out of the New Testament, are plainly to the purpose, and do as fully and expressly assert what they are brought for, as can be desir'd. So that, I think, there cannot possibly be need of any farther arguing about this case, but we may safely leave Men to judge, from what has been already said, on which side the truth lies. I shall therefore proceed to answer what is objected.

Secondly, That it is cruel and unjust to punish temporary sins with eternal Torments : and therefore we may be sure that God will not do it. So saith *Wolffgenius* upon the 25th of *St. Matthew* and the 46th ver.. *Those, the wicked, shall go into everlasting punishment ; as God is most exactly just in all his doings, so here we may be sure he will not inflict upon any sinner a punishment greater than his deserts. But there can be no sins so heinous, as to be equal to eternal torments.* And indeed, allowing the premises to be true, the conclusion is certain. God cannot do a cruel or unjust thing, therefore, if to punish Sinners with eternal Torments be cruel and unjust, undoubtedly God will not do it. I say torments, and by those I mean positive torments inflicted by God, such as that of Hell-fire, &c. not such, as are the natural consequences of our loss of God and Heaven, and of our own acquir'd evil

habit of mind, and our eternal existence under these. For a great many Men make a wide difference, as to these two : and tho' they readily allow, that it is not to be expected, that God should alter the natural course of things, as he must do, to prevent the latter ; yet they can by no means allow it to be consistent with his Goodness and Justice, to inflict the former.

I have already said several things, in a former discourse, wherein I consider'd the Arguments drawn from Reason, for proof of the Eternity of Hell-Torments, which, I think, may bid fair, for an answer to this objection. As

First, That it is not look'd upon to be cruel and unjust amongst Men, to inflict the most lasting punishments, which they are able, upon some great and notorious offenders. It is thought necessary, for the support of human Governments, that the supreme Power in them should have a right over the whole duration of Men's lives, which is all of their beings, that their Government can extend to : that so it may, as occasion requires, not only for habitual offences, but for single acts of very heinous Crimes, inflict perpetual banishment or imprisonment, nay or even perpetual positive Torments, perpetual labouring in the Mines, at the Gallies, or the like, And can we possibly then be so foolish as to think that God has not as much right, to inflict such punishments upon those that offend him, as are plainly necessary for keeping up his Authority, and his Government of the World, as we Men have, to maintain our Authority and Government over one another ? And does not every days experience convince us, that a right of inflicting eternal Punishments is absolutely necessary, for this purpose ? Less than this, we are sure, would not do : because even this it self will not do, with the greatest part of mankind. So that, if it were possible, something more, rather than less, than eternal Torments, ought still to be threaten'd.

If it be said, that Men are consenting to that power, which human Governments exercise over the whole duration of their lives : and that therefore they can have no wrong done them, by the exercise of it upon them ; but that they are not so

consenting to God's right of inflicting eternal Torments upon Sinners. I answer, that God has no need of their consent, in this point: for his Creation must have given him an absolute right to all such power over his Creatures, as is necessary to make them his faithful Worshippers and Servants, as I have before shew'd this, of inflicting eternal Torments to be.

And, whereas some Men will be apt to say farther, that it doth indeed seem necessary, that God should threaten Sinners, with eternal Torments, but that it does not seem necessary that God should have a right actually to inflict these. I answer, that it is too mean and unworthy a thing to be suppos'd of God, that he should threaten any thing, which he has not a right to inflict: and moreover, that this bare supposition, that God has not a right to inflict what he threatens, must necessarily hinder the force and efficacy of his threatenings.

Secondly, That the demerits of a sinful life, are so, beyond all conception, great: that it is impossible that any punishment can be too great for it. To live, for a long while, in an habitual neglect and contempt of the Sovereign Lord, Creator and Governor of the World; to spend a whole life, or great part of it, in defying Infinite Power, in disparaging Infinite Wisdom, in despising Infinite Goodness, in hating Infinite Perfection; to have no Gratitude, for the greatest of Benefactors, no Duty for the most Rightful of Governours, no Honour for the most Glorious of Potentates, no awe for the most Tremendous of Majesties; in one word, to be continually affronting and provoking every Person, of the Blessed Trinity: to despise the Riches of God's Goodness, in sending his Son into the World to seek and to save us, instead of letting it lead us to repentance: to trample under Foot the Son of God, and to count his Blood of the Covenant, wherewith we are Sanctify'd, an unholy Thing: to do despite unto the Spirit of Grace, and to turn a deaf Ear towards him, and to grieve him, when he stands at the Door and knocketh; to say all at once, to refuse eternal Happiness, to fly from every thing that is good, and to choose and pursue every thing that

that is Evil; what is all this put together, but such a prodigious Mass of Sin and Folly, such an intolerable Complication of every thing, that is most offensive and provoking to God, as no punishment can be too great, no torments endure too long, for?

Lastly, That Sinners do, purely thro' their own fault, and in direct opposition to many gracious means us'd by God to prevent this, render themselves proper Objects of God's everlasting Wrath; by wilfully contracting such sinful Habits, in this life, as they were plainly forewarn'd, would bring them under a necessity of continuing everlasting Sinners, in the next Life. And if, notwithstanding all these merciful Warnings and Endeavours of the divine Goodness to the contrary, they would still obstinately go on in their Sins, and at last dye in them, and by so doing, wilfully subject themselves to this Necessity, of continuing everlastingly unjust and everlastingly filthy, and consequently proper Objects of God's everlasting Wrath; can they have any Reason to complain of God, for inflicting his everlasting Wrath and Vengeance upon them, who have thus wilfully made themselves the proper Object of it?

I shall only add two Considerations more, which alone, I think, might be sufficient to conclude us, upon this Head.

First, That since God has so plainly reveal'd that the Torments of the Damn'd shall be Eternal, this is a much clearer and stronger Argument, that it is not cruel and unjust in God to make them so; than it is, on the other side, that he has not reveal'd that they shall be Eternal, because it seems to us to be Cruel and Unjust in God, so to make them. We are much better Judges of what God has plainly reveal'd, than we are of what is Just and fit for him to do, in punishing his Creatures: and therefore, methinks, we ought in all Modesty, to turn that Objection, which is now before us, into an Answer to it self. God say some Men, cannot justly punish temporary Sins, with eternal Torments, therefore we are sure that he has not reveal'd that he will do so. God, say we on the other side, has plainly reveal'd that he will punish Sinners, with eternal Torments, therefore we are sure that

that it cannot be unjust in him so to do. This I take to be much the surest side of the Argument, because the Ground, which we proceed upon in this, is much surer, than that, upon which we proceed in the other. We cannot easily be mistaken, in judging whither a Revelation be plain or no: but we may very easily be mistaken, in judging what is just or unjust, fit or unfit, for God to do, in relation to his Creatures.

Secondly, That, taking eternal Misery and eternal Happiness, as they are join'd together in the New Testament, I cannot but think that, if God had left it perfectly to our own choice, whither we would accept of them or no, thus join'd, we should have accepted of them: and if so, we can have no Reason to call that cruel and unjust in God, which, if we had had full power of choosing or refusing, we should rather have chosen, than refus'd. Eternal Misery, perhaps you'll say, is a most terrible thing, to run any, the least, hazard of; but is not eternal Happiness as desirable, on the other side, as that is terrible? And, if so, what reason can there possibly be, for refusing an eternity of happiness, which we may make sure of, if we please, for fear of an eternity of misery, which we may as surely avoid, if we please? I make no doubt but Men would have lik'd the happiness, without the hazard of the misery, much better: but, since that could not be had, both together seem to me much more eligible, than no happiness at all.

And thus much may serve to prove, that it is not cruel and unjust in God, to inflict eternal Torments upon sinners. I proceed to the

Last Objection viz. that, tho' it should be allow'd that God has plainly threaten'd eternal punishment, yet he is not oblig'd rigorously to make good his threatnings, but may mitigate or recede from them, as far as he pleaseth: and that therefore we cannot certainly infer from them, that sinners shall be eternally punish'd. So saith Mr. Hobbes, *We cannot prove, from the Justice of God, which has threaten'd eternal torments upon sinners, that their torments will really be eternal. For although he is unjust, who doth not perform the good, which he owes to any one; nevertheless he who doth not execute the evils or harms, which he has threatned, is not unjust, but merciful. (a) How much less shall God, who is infinitely merciful, be accounted unjust, for mitigating either the lastingness, or intensity of our deserv'd punishments?*

And, long before Mr. Hobbes, Eunomius and his followers had us'd to talk much at the same rate, or rather worse; *viz. (b) That the torments of hell would not really be, but were only threatned, to make men afraid. And accordingly we frequently find St. Chrysostom inveighing against some, in his time, who were wont to say, that (c) God's threatnings of eternal torments, were only vain words, which should never be accomplish'd; that God is gracious and merciful, and that none of these things will come to pass, but that God only threatens them, to make us humble and good. (d)*

(a) *Append. ad Levit. p. 335.* (b) *Zonar. ad Can. 1. Conc. Constant. p. 68.* (c) *Chrysost. Homil. 8. in 1. Thes.* (d) *Hebr. 25. 31. in Epist. ad Rom.*

So that this Objection you see has been of a very long standing; has often been in the Mouths of Men, and probably much oftner in their Hearts: and moreover, it has been carry'd so far as to make, not only the Eternity of Hell-Torments, but even Hell it self, of little, or no force.

It is high time therefore to take this Objection to task: and that too, so much the rather, because we find how ready Men are to infer, that, if God may thus recede from these threatnings, he certainly will do so. Let him not be ty'd up from this, by his Veracity, Unchangeableness and Justice, and they will presently believe and hope, that his Mercy will do all, that it may do.

But what a strange and unreasonable way of arguing is this, both as to the Premises and the Conclusion? It is far from being plain that God has left himself at liberty, to recede from his threatnings, in this case; and much farther, that, if he has, he will think it fit to use this Liberty, in favour of Sinners.

That God is not oblig'd to make good all his Threatnings, I readily grant: because the Scripture it self assures us, that his Threatnings of temporal Judgments are very often conditional, and consequently, if the condition, upon which they are suspended, intervenes, he ought not to proceed to Execution. Nay I will not say that in all other Cases, except these in which God himself has told us there is a condition suppos'd, God is oblig'd rigorously to execute his Threatnings. But then, on the other hand, it is acknowledg'd by all, that some of God's Threatnings are absolute and immutable. Such are all those, which he has confirm'd by an Oath, which the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, is an immutable thing, in which it is impossible for God to lye. And accordingly Divines are generally agreed, that the wicked shall never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, because God has sworn, that they shall never enter his rest; not only that earthly rest, which he had provided for his People in the Land of *Canaan*, but into that heavenly rest, which remaineth for the People of God, of which the rest in the Land of *Canaan* was but a Type and Shadow.

The great thing therefore which we are to enquire after is, of which of these two sorts the threatnings of Eternal Torments are, whether absolute or conditional. And truly to me it seems very plain that God design'd them to be absolute. For, tho' it doth not appear that he has any where confirm'd them by an Oath, yet it appears that he has done so much for their Confirmation, as is at least equal to an Oath, and therefore ought in all reason, to be suppos'd to render them as immutable, as an Oath it self would have done. He has sent his only begotten Son into World, to be the revealer of this his Wrath, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of Men. He made him the Preacher of a Fire for the wicked, that never shall be quench'd. He made him himself, whom he hath appointed to be our Judge, to describe the Day of Judgment, and to give us an Account beforehand of the very Sentence, which shall then be pronounc'd upon the Wicked, commanding them to depart into everlasting

ing Fire; and of the immediate Execution that shall follow this Sentence: They shall go away into everlasting Punishment. And could the Oath of God it self have given a more solemn Confirmation to his Threatnings, than all this has done? Can we think that God sent his Son, only to speak big, but vain, Words? That our Judge himself frighten'd us with a Sentence, that shall never be Executed? Nay, and that he foretold the certain Execution of it, which yet, we our selves shall find, shall never come to pass? Certainly it was not in the Power of God himself to have given a more sacred ratification to his threatnings, than he has this way done. His Son himself has been the Mediator of the Covenant between him and Mankind, he has seal'd the truth of his threatnings, as well as of his promises, with his Blood; and who then shall dare to say they are not absolute? Oh, how did that Holy Father St. *Chrysostom*, break out into the utmost anger and indignation, against those of his time, who question'd the certain accomplishment of these our Saviour's threatnings? And are these then only words, saith he? 'Is not the Rich Man, that despis'd *Lazarus* really punish'd? Are not the foolish Virgins rejected, by the Bridegroom? Do not they, who regarded not our Saviour, depart into the Fire prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels? Shall not he, that had not on a Wedding Garment, be bound hand and foot, and cast out into utter darkness? Is not he, who demanded the hundred Pence of his fellow Servant, deliver'd to the Tormentors? Is not that true, which was said concerning the Harlots, that their Worm shall not die, and their fire shall never be quench'd? Are these only threatnings? So you say indeed; but how dare you to say so, in a matter of this vast moment? How dare you, of your own head, to determine these things thus? Since I my self am able, as well from what Christ said, as what he did, to manifest the quite contrary.

Let us not then deceive our selves any longer, with that general shelter from threatnings, that these do not pass over a right, like promises, and therefore may be receded from. For, how true soever this may be in the general, it will do us no manner of Service, in this particular case before us. Here God and his Son have in so solemn a manner engag'd themselves, for the actual execution of their threatnings, that sure, if ever any threatnings were absolute, these must be so. * However therefore God may defer the execution of temporal Evils, his Truth and Veracity is concern'd to inflict eternal punishments, upon impenitent Sinners.

But, supposing that there were a Condition reserv'd in these threatnings, yet what can this condition be, but such an one, as Sinners shall never be able to perform? And consequently this will be just the same, as if there were no condition reserv'd at all. I have shew'd you, in a former discourse, that we cannot conceive any other conditions, upon which the damn'd can hope ever to get rid of the guilt of their Sins, and to be reconcil'd to God, than satisfaction, or repentance, and that both these the damn'd are incapable of. And what then necessarily follows, as Bp. *Stillingfleet* expresseth it, but that, 'where the only conditions imply'd in these threatnings

* *Arch-Bishop Tillotson, Sermon, of the Truth of God, p. 361.*

are wanting, these Hypothetical Comminations become absolute predictions, of what shall certainly come to pass, on all those who are destitute of the conditions suppos'd in them? (*Orig. Sac. p. 131.*)

Nay, and since we are supposing, let us suppose, even the very utmost that these Men can desire, that God is perfectly free to recede from these threatnings, without any condition, just as he himself pleases. Yet what shadow of reason can Sinners have to hope, that God will ever thus recede, for their sakes? I know, their great hope is in his Mercy. But is not God's mercy always directed by his Wisdom, and agreeable to his Holiness, Justice, and Honour? And will not these always plead more strongly for the punishing of Sinners, than the other for not punishing, or releasing them from punishment? Is not God always the same unchangeable God? And is not his unchangeableness matter of great terror to wicked Men? * Let but the Sinner consider, as Arch-Bp. Titorson admirably expresseth it, what God is, and the consideration of his unchangeable nature must needs terrify him. *He is a Holy God, and of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity.* Hab. 1. 12. *He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him, the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of Iniquity.* Psal. 5. 4, 5. *He is likewise a just God, and will by no means clear the guilty, nor let sin go unpunish'd.* Exod. 34. 7. He is also omnipotent, and able to execute the vengeance threaten'd against Sinners. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger?* Psal. 90. 11. *Thou, even thou, art to be fear'd, and who may stand in thy sight when thou art angry.* Psal. 76. 7. *Strong is the Lord God who judgeth.* Revel. 18. 8. And which gives a sad accent to all this, he that is thus Holy and Just and Powerful, continues for ever the same, and will never alter or put off any of these properties, will never cease to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable enemy to all impenitent Sinners; and is it not a fearful thing to fall into the hands of this Holy and Just and Omnipotent God, who lives for ever, and can punish for ever? Let all obstinate Sinners bear this and tremble; you cannot be more obstinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than God is peremptorily resolv'd to make you miserable. If you be determin'd upon a sinful course, God is also determin'd how he will deal with you, that he will not spare, but that his anger and jealousy shall smoke against you, and that all the curses that are written in his Book shall light upon you, and that he will blot out your name from under Heaven.

In vain then do Sinners comfort themselves, with the hope of God's not being oblig'd rigorously to make good his threatnings of eternal Torments. It seems most probable, that he has oblig'd himself to do this. Or, if he has not, but has reserv'd to himself some conditions, which if the damn'd shall ever be able to perform, they may then hope for his mercy, and release from their Torments: Yet we are utterly at a loss to find out any such conditions, as it could be proper for God thus to reserve, which the damn'd shall ever be capable of performing. Nay, if God be

perfect liberty, even without any condition, to recede, as far as ever pleaseth, from these threatnings, yet still there is abundantly more reason to believe, that he will not in the least recede, than that he will. And where then is the hope of the wicked, in this case?

And thus I have gone through this great and important subject of Hell Torments: And, I hope, have said enough upon it, if not to satisfy Mens curiosity; yet, which is much better, to satisfy their reason, and confirm their belief, and excite their fears, and quicken their diligence in working out their Salvation; which are the great ends, which we are to aim at in all our Discourses, upon this, and such like subjects. It is indeed a very grievous consideration, to think how willing Men are to deceive and impose upon themselves, by superficial and false reasonings, in a case of such infinite concernment, as this is. But let not them be more ready to deceive themselves, than we, whose duty it is to watch over them for their good, shall be to undeceive them. The Terrors of the Lord are so proper a Topick to perswade Men, that we cannot insist too often, or too much upon them. And, whither Men will hear, or whither they will forbear, we are to be instant, in season, and out of season, in warning them to consider, at their utmost peril, what the end of those Men will be, who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; *when the Lord Jesus shall be reveal'd from Heaven with his mighty Angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance of them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* 1 Pet. 4. 17. 2 Thess. 7. 8, 9.

I cannot shut up this important subject better, than with a most pathetic Exhortation of that pious Father, * St. Chrysostom, in relation to Hell Torments. Oh madness! Oh stupid and brutal folly, saith he, to love pleasure and sin so well, as to be uneasy under the thoughts of these things. Hence come all our odd opinions about them: And were we but once resoly'd to become truly vertuous, we should soon believe, without the least doubting, that there is such a place as Hell. But where, you will say, is this Hell to be? Alas! What does that concern thee? Our great business is to enquire, whether it shall really be or no, not where will be the particular place of its situation. Let us not therefore spend our time in enquiring where it is, but rather in enquiring how we may avoid it. Nor let us disbelieve future punishments, because God does not punish all Sinners in this Life: For God is merciful and long suffering, and therefore threatens, but doth not immediately execute his threatnings. I have no pleasure, saith God, in the Death of a Sinner; but this very saying is a proof, that there is such a thing as the Death of a Sinner: otherwise it would be superfluous. I know that nothing is more displeasing to you, than such discourses as these, but to me nothing is more pleasant. And I heartily wish, that at dinner, at supper, in all places and conversations, we would accustom our selves, to discourse concerning Hell: For then we should

* Homil. 31. in Ep. ad Rom.
'never

never be too much griev'd with the Calamities, nor taken with the
 Pleasures of this Life: For what is Poverty, Sicknes, Captivity, Blind-
 ness, to the Torments of Hell? To be starved with Famine, to be
 blind from our Youth, to be forced to beg our Bread, what is all this?
 Even not worth speaking of, if compared with the miseries of that place.
 Let us then be continually discoursing about these things, and our thus
 keeping up the remembrance of Hell, in our Minds, will prevent our
 falling into it. But, perhaps you'll say, we grant that there is an Hell,
 but then it is only for Unbelievers. But, pray, tell me, why so?
 Is it because believers have own'd their Lord? But what good will this
 do them? For if they lead wicked Lives, they shall suffer greater Punish-
 ments, than Unbelievers. *That Servant who knew his Lord's will, but*
did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. Why then dost thou jest,
 in serious matters? Why dost thou deceive thy self, and destroy thy
 Soul, by false reasonings? Why dost thou oppose the goodness of God,
 who has prepar'd and threatned Hell for this very end, that we, being
 made better by the fears of it, may not fall into it? He therefore that
 hinders our discoursing about this, doth, in effect, force and thrust us
 into it. Do not therefore weaken the hands of those, that labour for
 Vertue, nor sooth the laziness of those, who are, as it were, a sleep in
 their Sins: For if Men are once perswaded, that there is no such place
 as Hell, when will they ever quit their Sins? Let us therefore forbear
 this ridiculous way of proceeding, and stop the Mouths of all such, as
 speak against Hell: For there will be a strict enquiry, after our good
 and bad deeds, nay, even after the very smallest of them. Unchast
 Looks, idle Words, simple Reproaches, evil Desires, Drunkenness, &c.
 must all be accounted for, and punish'd. How then do you dare to
 say that God, who is so exact a Searcher and Tryer of our Lives; has
 only threatned Hell, but that there is really no such thing? Do not, I
 beseech you do not, destroy your self, and all that shall be perswaded
 by you, by such vain hopes. If you will not believe us, ask the *Jews*,
 the *Greeks*, all sorts of Hereticks; and they will all, with one mouth,
 make answer, that there shall be a future Judgment, and state of Re-
 tribution: Or, if the evidence of Men be not sufficient, ask the very
 Devils themselves, and you shall hear them crying out, *Why art thou*
come to torment us, before our time? Wherefore, putting all these
 things together, perswade your selves not to trifle any longer, least
 you should be at last convinc'd by experience, that there is an Hell.
 But learn from hence to be sober, that so thou mayest both avoid the
 Torments of that place, and obtain the Happiness of Heaven. Thro
 the Grace and Mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ: *To whom, with the Fa-*
ther and the Holy Spirit, be all Honour, Power, and Glory, for ever
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